

Mayor's Column for the October 17, 2012 Review

Nine classes of third graders visited City Hall over four days this month. Part of the annual fall field trips is a question and answer session with the mayor in the Common Council Chambers. "Do you know everything about Evansville?" is a question that has been asked a number of times over the years. I explain that I am always learning new things about our community.

This past weekend I learned of the Evansville Writers' Club, a creative writers group formed in 1950, with members that included Ruby Kuenzli, Estella Ringhand, Dorothy Schrader, Bethany Evans, Helen Smith, Sally Eager, Roy Lewis and Albert Gibbs. On Sunday I attended the Mary Peckham living estate auction and was the successful bidder on a stack of written materials by well-known local author Helen Smith. In the evening I studied the book on the top of the pile, "The Evansville Anthology of Verse," a compilation of poetry by the Writers' Club dated 1952.

I was not expecting the content of the dedication page, which reads:

"When we, the members of the Evansville Writers' Club, decided to sponsor this book of poetry written by local people, we began to wonder to whom it should be dedicated.

There seemed to be one person who had given us kindly consideration and encouragement both individually and collectively. Who, though not a member, had been a real booster for our club and aided it in every possible way; who had given us confidence in ourselves.

To this person, Mary Peckham, who has believed in and helped us all, we dedicate this experimental volume of verse."

Mary Peckham was 36 years old when she was so acknowledged by Evansville residents. Mary, now 96, is the primary benefactor of our new Creekside Place. I am not surprised that she has enriched our city over decades in her quiet, steady, unassuming way.

Last month Julie Hermanson, Theresa Tolan, and I attended a day-long workshop entitled "Identifying Community Strengths: A Discussion with John McKnight." McKnight is an emeritus professor of education and social policy and an expert on community development at Northwestern University. His research in thousands of communities over decades supports the basic idea that healthy, vibrant communities are the result of and sustained by the residents within the community. The assets, talents, and efforts of local citizens and community organizations are the building blocks of a strong community and successfully address issues and weaknesses that occur. It is through connecting the many community assets, talents, and efforts that community-wide strength is maximized. McKnight discussed ways of discovering, mobilizing, and building local community capacity.

I thought about Evansville as I absorbed his message. A dozen years ago Evansville Community Partnership (ECP) was formed by forty citizens. Among the areas of focus of the group were: building connections between new and long-time residents, offering youth activities, providing senior services, and improving Lake Leota. The Evansville Youth Center, the Evansville Area Primetimers, and SOLE (Save Our Lake Environment) were established to address identified community needs. The ECP current mission statement is "... to give all members of the community an opportunity to participate in the cooperative creation of an economically and socially sound, vibrant future for our community and its people." ECP is about discovering, mobilizing, and building local community capacity. ECP is about inclusiveness and diversity.

The Evansville community and our businesses and organizations recognized the need for a community meeting place. In challenging economic times, we opened our wallets to build Creekside Place. Today, Creekside Place hosts a wide variety of meetings, classes, and activities, opportunities for making connections. It, too, is about inclusiveness and diversity. I am often told by citizens that they do not know how we got along before Creekside Place.

Intergenerational bonds are being fostered in many ways in Evansville. The mentoring project of the Woodchucks, the Lions Club sponsorship of youth scouting, the FFA Alumni support of youth programs, the Youth Center activities with the Heights/Evansville Manor, and the community service projects of EHS students are examples of intergenerational connections.

A group of community leaders started BASE (Building A Safer Evansville) to build a local coalition to raise awareness of underage substance abuse and develop prevention strategies and efforts. Hard work by the BASE coalition resulted in success in obtaining a Drug Free America Grant of \$625,000 to fund local efforts.

Mary Peckham is the epitome of the fabric of our community, supporting Evansville through the decades and giving of her specific strengths. Our community has been and is filled with people like Mary—dedicated, committed residents that freely have given their specific talents and expertise. Montgomery, DeKolver, Eager, Losey, Baker, Prudhon, Kuelz—I'm sure all of you can add names to this list. Evansville is a can-do community because we are rich in citizens willing to step up and make our wonderful community even better. Our tradition is community involvement and connection.

I asked the third grade visitors if they would like to be mayor some day. About half of them raised their hands; I am excited by the number of enthusiastic future leaders. Building leadership capacity in our youth is a priority. It is an important investment in our future.

I sat next to a newer resident at a meeting of the Rock Hour Community TimeBank a couple of months ago. He indicated that he really liked Evansville because of the number and variety of programs, naming activities like the Farmers Market, TimeBank, Inventors

and Entrepreneurs Club, and Creekside Place. He enjoys our small town character with our many options for involvement.

There is an upcoming event, co-sponsored by ECP and Creekside Place, that will showcase the wealth of opportunities to become involved in our community. On Saturday, January 19, there will be an Evansville Activity Fair at Creekside Place. Local organizations are encouraged to participate, from sports leagues to book clubs, scouts to birding, Care Closet to Grove Society, quilting to Woodchucks. I invite all area citizens to see the variety of ways to become a part of the fabric of Evansville and add to the vitality of our community.

### Community Announcements

Fall leave pick up is underway through Thanksgiving. Please rake leaves into the gutter, leaving storm drains clear. Leaves only, please. Do not mix brush and garden debris with the leaves; it is a safety hazard.

The Rock County Planning Department will hold an open house on Thursday, October 18, at 6:30 p.m. in Room 250 of the Rock County Courthouse, 51 South Main Street. County Planning Staff will answer questions and take citizen input on proposed updates to the Rock County Farmland Preservation Program.

“A Special Evening with Eleanor Roosevelt,” as portrayed by actress Jessica Michna, will be the program for this year’s Annual Meeting of the Evansville Grove Society, on Wednesday, October 24, at Creekside Place. Social hour at 6 p.m. Dessert buffet, cash bar, awards, silent auction. Public invited. Free, donations welcome. Call John Decker as (608) 882-5528 for information.

A Creekside Place Halloween Party will be held on Saturday, October 27, from 8 p.m. to midnight. Music, dancing, treats, cash bar, costume contest in several categories. Call Creekside Place at (608) 882-0407 for further information.

### Community Congratulations

Our community congratulates and welcomes two new retail boutiques, the Artful Gourmet and Studio Repeats, recently opened on West Main Street. Stop by and see what they have to offer.

Congratulations to Evansville Manor on the recent completion of a significant remodeling project that has increased the number of private rooms and expanded the therapy facilities.